

# ISLĀM

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION  
AND THE FOUNDATION OF  
ETHICS AND MORALITY



Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas



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أَلَمْ يَكُنْ رَبُّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا

*"Am I not your Lord?"—they said: "Yea! we do testify!"*

AL-QUR'ĀNU'L-KARĪM, 7:172



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
الحمد لله رب العالمين  
الصلاة والسلام على اشرف الانبياء والمرسلين

## ***Islām: The Concept of Religion and The Foundation of Ethics and Morality***

The concept couched in the term *dīn*, which is generally understood to mean *religion*, is not the same as the concept *religion* as interpreted and understood throughout Western religious history. When we speak of Islām and refer to it in English as a 'religion', we mean and understand by it the *dīn*, in which all the basic connotations inherent in the term *dīn*<sup>1</sup> are conceived as gathered into a single unity of coherent meaning as reflected in the Holy Qur'ān and in the Arabic language to which it belongs.

The word *dīn* derived from the Arabic root DYN has many primary significations which although seemingly contrary to one another are yet all conceptually interconnected, so that the ultimate meaning derived from them all presents itself as a clarified unity of the whole. By 'the whole' I mean that which is described as the Religion of Islām, which contains within itself all the relevant possibilities of meaning inherent in the concept of *dīn*. Since we are dealing with an Islamic concept which is translated into a living reality intimately and profoundly lived

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<sup>1</sup> In this book my interpretation of the basic connotations inherent in the term *dīn* is based on Ibn Manẓūr's standard classic, the *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beyrouth, 1968, 15v.), hereafter cited as *LA*. For what is stated in this page and the next, see vol. 13:166, col. 2-171, col. 2.



in human experience, the apparent contrariness in its basic meanings is indeed not due to vagueness; it is, rather, due to the contrariness inherent in human nature itself, which they faithfully reflect. And their power to reflect human nature faithfully is itself clear demonstration of their lucidity and veracity and authenticity in conveying truth.

The primary significations of the term *dīn* can be reduced to four: (1) *indebtedness*; (2) *submissiveness*; (3) *judicious power*; (4) *natural inclination or tendency*. In what presently follows, I shall attempt to explain them briefly and place them in their relevant contexts, drawing forth the coherent ultimate meaning intended, which denotes the faith, beliefs and practices and teachings adhered to by the Muslims individually and collectively as a Community and manifesting itself altogether as an objective whole as the Religion called Islām.

The verb *dāna* which derives from *dīn* conveys the meaning of *being indebted*, including various other meanings connected with *debts*, some of them contraries. In the state in which one finds oneself being in debt—that is to say, a *dā'in*—it follows that one subjects oneself, in the sense of *yielding* and *obeying*, to law and ordinances governing debts, and also, in a way, to the creditor, who is likewise designated as a *dā'in*.<sup>2</sup> There is also conveyed in the situation described the fact that one in debt is under *obligation*, or *dayn*. Being in debt and under obligation naturally involves *judgement*: *daynūnah*, and *conviction*: *idānah*, as the case may be. All the above significations including their contraries inherent in *dāna* are practicable possibilities only in organized societies involved in commercial life in *towns* and *cities*, denoted by *mudun* or *madā'in*. A town or city, a *madīnah*, has a *judge*, *ruler*, or *governor*—a *dayyān*. Thus already here, in the various applications of the verb *dāna* alone, we see rising

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<sup>2</sup> *Dā'in* refers both to *debtor* as well as *creditor*, and this apparent contrariness in meaning can indeed be resolved if we transpose both these meanings to refer to the two natures of man, that is, the rational soul and the animal or carnal soul. See below pp. 17-20.

before our mind's eye a picture of civilized living; of societal life of law and order and justice and authority.<sup>3</sup> It is, conceptually at least, connected intimately with another verb *maddana*<sup>4</sup> which means: to *build* or to *found cities*: to *civilize*, to *refine* and to *humanize*; from which is derived another term: *tamaddun*, meaning *civilization* and *refinement* in *social culture*. Thus we derive from the primary signification of being in a state of debt other correlated significations, such as: to *abase oneself*, to *serve* (a master), to *become enslaved*; and from another such signification of *judge*, *ruler* and *governor* is derived meanings which denote the *becoming mighty*, *powerful* and *strong*;

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<sup>3</sup> It is I think extremely important to discern both the intimate and profoundly significant connection between the concept of *dīn* and that of *madīnah* which derives from it, and the role of the Believers individually in relation to the former and collectively in relation to the latter. Considerable relevance must be seen in the significance of the change of name of the town once known as Yathrib to *al-Madīnah*: *the City*—or more precisely, *Madinatu'l-Nabīy: the City of the Prophet*—which occurred soon after the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!) made his historic Flight (*hijrah*) and settled there. The first Community of Believers was formed there at the time, and it was that Flight that marked the New Era in the history of mankind. We must see the fact that *al-Madīnah* was so called and named because it was there that the true *dīn* became realized for mankind. There the Believers enslaved themselves under the authority and jurisdiction of the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!), its *dayyān*; there the realization of the debt to God took definite form, and the approved manner and method of its repayment began to unfold. The City of the Prophet signified the Place where true *dīn* was enacted under his authority and jurisdiction. We may further see that the City became, for the Community, the epitome of the socio-political order of Islām; and for the individual Believer it became, by analogy, the symbol of the Believer's body and physical being in which the rational soul, in emulation of him who may God bless and give Peace!, exercises authority and just government. For further relevant interpretation, see below, pp. 4-13; 14-21; 22-29; 34-35; 36-42; 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> *LA*, vol. 13:402, col. 2-403, col. 1.

a master, one elevated in rank, and glorious; and yet further, the meanings: *judgement, requital or reckoning* (at some appointed time). Now the very notion of law and order and justice and authority and social cultural refinement inherent in all these significations derived from the concept *dīn* must surely presuppose the existence of a *mode or manner of acting* consistent with what is reflected in the law, the order, the justice, the authority and social cultural refinement—a mode or manner of acting, or a *state of being* considered as *normal* in relation to them; so that this *state of being* is a state that is *customary or habitual*. From here, then, we can see the logic behind the derivation of the other primary signification of the concept *dīn* as *custom, habit, disposition or natural tendency*. At this juncture it becomes increasingly clear that the concept *dīn* in its most basic form indeed reflects in true testimony the natural tendency of man to form societies and obey laws and seek just government. The idea of a *kingdom, a cosmopolis*, inherent in the concept *dīn* that rises before our vision is most important in helping us attain a more profound understanding of it, and needs be reiterated here, for we shall have recourse to it again when we deal with the religious and spiritual aspects of man's existential experience.

I have thus far explained only in cursory manner the basic concept of *dīn*, reducing the various connotations to four primary significations and showing their mutual actual and conceptual connections, in the context of human 'secular' relations. In the religious context, that of the relationship between man and God, and what God approves of man's relations with his fellow-men, the primary significations, while maintaining their basic meanings, nevertheless undergo profound synthesis and intensification at once true to the experience described and to the description of the Religion of Islām as the objective faith, beliefs and practices and teachings experienced and lived by each and every member of the Muslim Community as well as by the Community as a whole.

How can the concept of *being indebted* be explained in the religious and spiritual context?—one may ask; what is the nature of the debt?, and to whom is the debt owed? We answer that man is indebted to God, his Creator and Provider, for bringing him into existence and maintaining him in his existence. Man was once nothing and did not exist, and now he is:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً  
فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ﴿١٣﴾ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً  
فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا  
آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

‘Man We did create from a quintessence of clay; Then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a lump; the We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the Best to create!’<sup>5</sup>

The man who ponders seriously his origin will realize that a few decades ago he did not exist, and the whole of mankind now existing neither existed nor knew of their possible present existence. The same truth applies to all ages of man from the beginnings of his existence in time. So naturally he who ponders thus sincerely knows intuitively that his sense of being indebted for his creation and existence cannot really be directed to his parents, for he knows equally well that his parents too are subject to the same process by the same Creator and Provider. Man does not himself cause his own growth and

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<sup>5</sup> *Al-Mu'minūn* (23):12-14

development from the state of a clot of congealed blood to the one that now stands mature and perfect. He knows that even in his mature and perfect state he is not able to create for himself his sense of sight or hearing or other—and let alone move himself in conscious growth and development in his helpless embryonic stage. Then again:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ  
عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا ﴿١٧٢﴾

‘When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam—from their loins—their descendents, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): “Am I not your Lord?”—they said: “Yea! we do testify!”<sup>6</sup>

The rightly guided man realizes that his very self, his soul, has already acknowledged God as his Lord, even before his existence as a man, so that such a man recognizes his Creator and Cherisher and Sustainer. The nature of the debt of creation and existence is so tremendously total that man, the moment he is created and given existence, is *already* in a state of utter loss, for he possesses really nothing himself, seeing that everything about him and in him and from him is what the Creator owns Who owns everything. And this is the purport of the words in the Holy Qur’ān:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ﴿٢﴾

Verily man is in loss (*khusrin*)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Al-A‘rāf* (7):172

<sup>7</sup> *Al-‘Asr* (103):2

Seeing that he owns absolutely nothing to 'repay' his debt, *except his own consciousness of the fact that he is himself the very substance* of the debt, so must he 'repay' with himself, so must he 'return' himself to Him Who owns him absolutely. He is himself the debt to be returned to the Owner, and 'returning the debt' means to *give himself up in service*, or *khidmah*, to his Lord and Master; to *abase himself* before Him—and so the rightly guided man sincerely and consciously *enslaves himself* for the sake of God in order to fulfill His Commands and Prohibitions and Ordinances, and thus to live out the dictates of His Law. The concept of 'return' alluded to above is also evident in the conceptual structure of *dīn*, for it can and does indeed mean, as I will elaborate in due course, a 'return to man's inherent nature', the concept 'nature' referring to the spiritual and not altogether the physical aspect of man's being.<sup>8</sup> It must also be pointed out that in the words of the Holy Qur'ān:

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ ﴿١١﴾

'By the heaven that hath rain'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of return is also expressed in the meaning of the term *'awwida* in the sense of returning to the past, that is, to tradition. Hence the signification of *dīn* as custom or habit. In this sense it means return to the tradition of the Prophet Ibrāhīm (upon whom be Peace!). In this connection, please see above p. 4 and below, pp. 12-15. It must be pointed out that by 'tradition' here is not meant the kind of tradition that originated and evolved in human history and culture and had its source in the human mind. It is, rather, what God has revealed and commanded and taught His Prophets and Messengers, so that although they appeared in successive and yet unconnected periods in history, they conveyed and acted as if what they conveyed and acted upon had been embodied in the continuity of a tradition.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Tāriq* (86):11; *LA*, vol. 8:120, col 2.

the word interpreted as 'rain' is *raj'*, which means literally 'return'.<sup>10</sup> It is interpreted as rain because God *returns* it time and again, and it refers to *good return* in the sense of *benefit*, *profit*, and *gain*. *Raj'* is therefore used synonymously in this sense with *rabah*, meaning gain,<sup>11</sup> which is the opposite or contrary of *khusr*, loss, to which reference has already been made above. Now it is appropriate to mention here that one of the basic meanings of *din* which has not been explained above is *recurrent rain*, rain that returns again and again; and hence we perceive that *din* here, like such as rain, alludes to benefit and gain (*rabah*). When we say that in order to 'repay' his debt man must 'return' himself to God, his Owner, his 'returning himself' is, like the returning rain,<sup>12</sup> a gain unto him. And this is the meaning of the saying:

من دان نفسه ربح

'He who enslaves himself gains (*rabiha* whose infinitive noun is: *rabah*).<sup>13</sup>

The expression 'enslaves himself' (*dāna nafsahu*) means 'gives himself up' (in service) and hence also 'returns himself' (to his Owner) as explained.<sup>14</sup> The same meaning is expressed

<sup>10</sup> There is a close connection between the concept here described and the application of the verb *raja'a* in its various forms in the Holy Qur'ān with reference to man's return to God.

<sup>11</sup> *LA*, vol. 2:442, col. 2-445, col. 1.

<sup>12</sup> True *din* brings life to a body otherwise dead just as 'the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which he gives therewith to an earth that is dead.' See *al-Baqarah* (2):164.

<sup>13</sup> *LA*, vol. 13:167, col. 1.

<sup>14</sup> It clearly refers to the man who, having consciously realized that he is himself the subject of his own debt to His Creator and Sustainer and Cherisher, enslaves himself to his self and hence 'returns' himself to his true Lord.

in the words of the Holy Prophet, may God bless and give him Peace!

الكيس من دان نفسه وعمل لما بعد الموت

“The intelligent one is he who enslaves himself (*dāna nafsahu*) and works for that which shall be after death.”<sup>15</sup>

‘That which shall be after death’ is that which shall be reckoned good, the requital, the good return. This good return is like the returning rain which brings benefit to the earth by bringing life to it and by causing goodly growth beneficial to life to grow from it. In like manner that rain gives life to the earth which would otherwise be dead, so does *dīn* give life to man, without which man would be as one who is, as it were, also ‘dead’. This is aptly symbolized by God’s Words in the Holy Qur’ān, where He says:

وَمَا أُنْزِلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ﴿١٦٤﴾

... In the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead-<sup>16</sup>

By ‘returning himself’ to his Lord and Master, by loyalty and truly following and obeying God’s Commands and Prohibitions and Ordinances and Law, the man thus acting will be requited and will receive his good return multiplied many times over, as God says in the Holy Qur’ān:

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<sup>15</sup> LA, vol. 13:169, col. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Baqarah (2):164.



مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا  
فَيُضَاعِفُهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً ﴿٢٤٥﴾

'Who is he who will loan (*yugridu*) to God a beautiful loan (*qarḍan hasanan*) which God will double to his credit and multiply many times?'<sup>17</sup>

Notice here that the verb used to signify 'loan' (*yugridu*), from *qarada*, *qarḍ* has not the same connotation as that which is termed as 'debt' (*dayn*), for the latter term is applicable to man only. The 'loan' here meant is 'the return of that which is owned 'originally' by the One Who now asks for it, and which is to be returned to Him.' Man is God's property and his existence is only 'lent' him for a time. On the other hand the expression 'goodly loan' (*qarḍan hasanan*) as applied to man has a metaphorical significance, in that it is his 'service to God', 'his good works' that is meant, for these can indeed be said to *belong* to him, and for the offering of which he will be requited in abundance. God is the Requirer, the Supreme Judge: *al-dayyān*. He is the King, *mālik*, of the Day of Judgement and Requit, *yawm al-dīn*, also called the Day of Reckoning, *yawn al-ḥisāb*.<sup>18</sup> The fact that God is referred to as King, and everything else as the Kingdom over which He exercises Absolute Power and Authority, *malakūt*, shows again that man is His *mamlūk*, His *slave*. So *dīn* in the religious context also refers to the state of being a slave.<sup>19</sup> We referred a while ago to man's

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Baqarah* (2):245.

<sup>18</sup> *Dīn* also means correct reckoning: *ḥisāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*. It is the apportioning of the precisely correct measure to a number or thing so that it fits into its proper place: *ʿadad al-mustawā*. This somewhat mathematical meaning conveys the sense of there being a system or law governing all and maintaining all in perfect equilibrium. See *LA*, vol. 13:169. Col. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *LA*, vol. 13:170, col. 1

'returning himself' as meaning 'giving himself up in service' (*khidmah*) to God. We now say that in effect what is truly meant is not 'service' in the sense of *any* service, or the kind offered to another man or human institution. The concept of *khidmah* implies that the one who gives such service is 'free', is not a bondman, but is 'his own master' in respect of himself. The concept *mamlūk*, however, conveys the implicit fact of ownership by the one who takes his service. The *mamlūk* is possessed by the *mālik*. So we do not say of one who serves God that he is a *khādim*, meaning servant, but that he is God's 'ābid, and he is in truth God's 'abd, meaning also servant or slave, which term has the connotation of 'being owned' by Him Whom he serves. In the religious context, therefore, 'abd is the correct term of reference to one who, in the realization that he is indebted absolutely to God, abases himself in service to Him; and hence the act of service appropriate for him is called 'ibādah and the service is 'ibādāt, which refers to all conscious and willing acts of service for the sake of God alone and approved by Him, including such as are prescribed worship. By worshipping God in such manner of service the man is fulfilling the purpose for his creation and existence, as God says in the Holy Qur'ān:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

'I have only created the Jinn and Man that they may serve Me' (*ya 'budūni*).<sup>20</sup>

When we say that such a man is fulfilling the purpose for his creation and existence, it is obvious that man's obligation to serve God is felt by him as *normal* because it comes as a *natural inclination* on the man's part to do so. This natural tendency in

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<sup>20</sup> *Al-Dhāriyāt* (51):56.

the man to serve and worship God is also referred to as *dīn*, as we have observed in the beginning in connection with its connotation as *custom*, *habit*, and *disposition*. However, here in the religious context it has a more specific signification of the *natural state of being* called *fiṭrah*. In fact *dīn* does also mean *fiṭrah*.<sup>21</sup> *Fiṭrah* is the pattern according to which God has created all things. It is God's manner of creating, *sunnat Allāh*, and everything fits each into its pattern created for it and set in its proper place. It is the Law of God. Submission to it brings harmony, for it means realization of what is inherent in one's true nature; opposition to it brings discord, for it means realization of what is extraneous to one's true nature. It is cosmos as opposed to chaos; justice as opposed to injustice. When God said: "Am I not your Lord?", and man's true self, testifying for itself, answered: "Yea!" in acknowledgement of the truth of God's Lordship, it has sealed a Covenant with God. Thus when man is manifested as man in this worldly life he will, if rightly guided, remember his Covenant and act accordingly as outlined above, so that his worship, his acts of piety, his life and death is lived out for the sake of God alone. One of the meanings of *fiṭrah* as *dīn* refers to the realization of this Covenant by man.<sup>22</sup> Submission in the sense described above means conscious, *willing* submission, and this submission does not entail loss of 'freedom' for him, since freedom in fact means *to act as his true nature demands*. The man who submits to God in this way is living out the *dīn*.

Submission, we say again, refers to conscious and willing submission, for were it neither conscious nor willing it cannot then mean real submission. The concept of submission is perhaps common to all religions, just as belief or faith is the core of all religions, but we maintain that not all religious enact real submission. Neither is the submission meant the kind that

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<sup>21</sup> *LA*, vol. 5:58, cols. 1 & 2; see also *al-Rūm* (30):30

<sup>22</sup> *LA*, vol. 5:56, col. 2, 57, col. 1.

is momentary or erratic, for real submission is a continuous act lived throughout the entire span of one's ethical life; nor is it the kind that operates only within the realm of the heart without manifesting itself outwardly in the action of the body as works performed in obedience to God's Law. Submission to God's Will means also obedience to His Law. The word denoting this sense of submission is *aslama*, as is evident in the Holy Qur'ān where God's says:

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ ﴿١٢٥﴾

Who can be better in religion (*dīn*) than one who submits (*aslama*) his face (i.e., his whole self) to God...?<sup>23</sup>

The *dīn* referred to is none other than Islām. There are, no doubt, other forms of *dīn*, but the one in which is enacted total submission (*istislām*) to God alone is the best, and this one is the only *dīn* acceptable to God, as He says in the Holy Qur'ān:

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ ﴿٨٠﴾

If anyone desires a religion (*dīn*) other than Islām (*al-Islām*), never will it be accepted of him...<sup>24</sup>

And again:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ﴿١٩﴾

Verily the Religion (*al-dīn*) in the sight of God is Islām (*al-Islām*).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Al-Nisā'* (4):125.

<sup>24</sup> *Āli 'Imrān* (3):85

According to the Holy Qur'ān, man cannot escape being in the state of living a *dīn* since all submit (*aslama*) to God's will. Hence, the term *dīn* is also used to denote religions other than Islām. However, what makes Islām different from other religions is that the submission according to Islām is *sincere* and *total* submission to God's Will, and this is enacted *willingly* as absolute obedience to the Law revealed by Him. This idea is implicitly expressed in the Holy Qur'ān, for example, in the following passage

أَفَعَيَّرَ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ  
طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

Do they seek for other than the religion (*dīn*) of God? while all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willing or unwilling, submitted (*aslama*) to His Will, and to Him shall they all be returned.<sup>26</sup>

The form in which submission is enacted or expressed is the form of the *dīn*, and it is here that diversity occurs between one *dīn* another.<sup>27</sup> This form, which is the manner of institution of belief and faith, the manner of expression of the law, the manner of religious attitude and ethical and moral conduct—the manner in which the submission to God is enacted in our life, is expressed by the concept *millah*. Islām follows the *millah* of the Prophet Ibrāhīm (*Abraham*), which is also the *millah* of

<sup>25</sup> *Alī 'Imrān* (3):19

<sup>26</sup> *Alī 'Imrān* (3):83.

<sup>27</sup> This of course does not imply that the diversity between religions is only a matter of form, for the difference in the form indeed implies a difference in the conception of God, His Essence and Attributes and Names and Acts – a difference in the conception expressed in Islām as *tawhīd*: the Unity of God.

the other Prophets after him (Peace be upon them all!). Their *millah* altogether is considered to be the *form* of the right religion *dīn al-qayyim*, because of all other *milal*, their *millah* alone inclined perfectly, *ḥanīfan*, towards the true Religion (*al-Islām*). They thus anticipate Islām in religious faith and belief and law and practice and hence are called also Muslims, even though the Religion of *Islām* as such reached its perfect crystallization only in the form externalized by the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!). Other religions have *evolved* their own systems or forms of submission based upon their own cultural traditions which do not necessarily derive from the *millah* of the Prophet Ibrāhīm (upon whom be Peace!) and yet some others, such as the *dīn* of the *Ahlu'l-Kitāb*—People of the Book—have evolved a mixture of their own cultural traditions with traditions based upon Revelation. It is to these various systems or forms of submission that, to return to the passage just quoted, the “unwilling” type of submission refers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In a sense, the words of God in the Holy Qur’ān:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

—Let there be no compulsion in religion (*al-Baqarah* (2):256)—corroborates what has been explained above in that in *true* religion there should be no compulsion: not only in the sense that, in the act of subjugating to religion and submitting to it, one must not compel others to submit; but in the sense that even with oneself, one must subjugate and submit oneself wholeheartedly and willingly, and love and enjoy the submission. Unwilling submission betrays arrogance, disobedience and rebellion, and is tantamount to misbelief, which is one of the forms of unbelief (*kufṛ*). It is a mistake to think belief in One God alone is sufficient in true religion, and that such belief guarantees security and salvation. Iblīs (Satan), who believes in the One True God and knows and acknowledges Him as his Creator, Cherisher and Sustainer, his *rabb*, is nevertheless a misbeliever (*kāfir*). Although Iblīs submits to God, yet he submits grudgingly and insolently, and his *kufṛ* is due to arrogance, disobedience and rebellion. His is the most notorious example of unwilling submission.

The concept of *dīn* in the sense of true obedience and real submission such as is here described in brief outlined is manifested in living reality in the Religion of Islām. It is in Islām that true and perfect *dīn* is realized, for in Islām alone is its self-expression fulfilled completely. Islām emulates the pattern or form according to which God governs His Kingdom; it is an imitation of the cosmic order manifested here in this worldly life as a social as well as political order. The social order of Islām encompasses all aspect of man's physical and material and spiritual existence in a way which, here and now, does justice to the individual as well as the society; and to the individual as a physical being as well as the individual as spirit, so that a Muslim is at once himself and his Community, and his Community is also he, since every other single member strives, like him, to realize the same purpose in life and to achieve the same goal. The social order of Islām is the Kingdom of God on earth, for in that order God, and not man, is *still* the King, the Supreme Sovereign Whose Will and Law and Ordinances and Commands and Prohibitions hold absolute sway. Man is only His vicegerent or *khalifah*, who is given the trust of government, the *amānah*, to rule according to God's Will and His Pleasure. When we say "rule", we do not simply mean to refer to the socio-political sense of 'ruling', for we mean by it also—indeed far more fundamentally so—the rule of one's self

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Unwilling submission, then, is not the mark of true belief, and a *kāfir* might therefore be also one who, though professing belief in One God, does not submit in real submission, but prefers instead to submit in his own obstinate way—a way, or manner, or form neither approved nor revealed and commanded by God. Real submission is that which has been perfected by the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!) as the model for mankind, for that is the manner of submission of all the Prophets and Messengers before him, and the form approved, revealed, and commanded by God. Thus, the fundamental core of true religion, then, is not the *belief*, but rather, more fundamentally, the *submission*; for the submission confirms and affirms the belief to be true and genuine.

by itself, since the trust refers to responsibility and freedom of the self to do justice to itself. Of this last statement we shall have recourse to elaborate presently, since what is meant reveals the very principle of Islamic ethics and morality. Islām, we say again, is a social order, but in that order every individual, each according to his latent capacity and power bestowed upon him by God to fulfill and realize his responsibility and freedom, strives to achieve and realize the ideal for himself in the Way<sup>29</sup> manifested by the Revealed Law<sup>30</sup> obeyed by all members of the Community. Thus then, just as every Muslim is a *khalifah* of God on earth, so is every Muslim also His slave, His *'abd*, striving by himself to perfect his service and devotion, his *'ibadah*, in the manner approved by God, his absolute Master. And since every individual in this social order is answerable to God alone, so even in that social order each individual is personally directing his true and real loyalty, *ṭā'ah*, to God alone, his Real King.

We have already said that the concept *dīn* reflects the idea of a kingdom—a cosmopolis. Commerce and trade are the life blood of the cosmopolis, and such activity together with its various implications is indeed inherent in the concept *dīn* as we have thus far described. It is no wonder then that in the Holy Qur'ān worldly life is depicted so persistently in the apt metaphors of commercial enterprise. In the cosmopolis or kingdom reflected in the concept *dīn*, there is depicted the bustling activities of the traffic of trade. Man is inexorably engaged in the trade: *al-tijārah*, in which he is himself the subject as well as object of his trade. He is his own capital, and his loss and gain depend upon his own sense of responsibility and exercise of freedom. He carries out the trust of buying and selling, of *bay'ah*, and bartering: *ishtarā*, and it is his self that he buys or sells or barterers; and depending upon his own

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<sup>29</sup> By 'the Way' I mean what refers to *ihsān*, or perfection in virtue.

<sup>30</sup> The Revealed Law, or *shari'ah*, is the law of God.



inclination towards the exercise of his will and deeds his trade will either prosper: *rabiḥa'l-tijārah*, or suffer loss: *ma rabiḥa'l-tijārah*. In the situation that rises before our vision we must see that the man so engaged realizes the utter seriousness of the trading venture he has willingly undertaken.<sup>31</sup> He is not simply an animal that eats and drinks and sleeps and disports after sensual pleasure<sup>32</sup>—nor savage nor barbarian he who thus transcends himself in the realization of his weighty responsibility and consciousness of his freedom to fulfill and redeem himself of the burden of existence. It is of such as he who barter his self for his true self that God refers when He says in the Holy Qurān:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَىٰ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ ﴿١١١﴾

Verily God has purchased of the Believers their selves—.<sup>33</sup>

The concept *dīn* with reference to the man of Islām<sup>34</sup> presupposes the emergence in him of the higher type of man capable of lofty aspirations towards self-improvement—the self-improvement that is no less than the actualization of his latent power and capacity to become a perfect man. The man of Islām as a city dweller, a cosmopolitan, living a civilized life according to clearly defined foundations of social order and codes of conduct is he to whom obedience to Divine Law, endeavour towards realizing true justice and striving after right knowledge are cardinal virtues. The motive of conduct of such a man is eternal blessedness, entrance into a state of supreme peace which he might even here perchance foretaste, but which shall be vouchsafed to him when he enters the threshold of that

<sup>31</sup> See, *al-Aḥzāb* (33):72

<sup>32</sup> See *al-A'raf* (7):179.

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Tawbah* (9):111.

<sup>34</sup> The man of Islām, i.e., the Muslim.

other City and becomes a dweller, a citizen of that other Kingdom wherein his ultimate bliss shall be the beholding of the Glorious Countenance of the King.

While Islām is the epitome of the Divine cosmic order, the man of Islām who is conscious of his destiny realizes that he is himself, as physical being, also an epitome of the cosmos, a microcosmic representation, *'ālam ṣaghīr*, of the Macrocosmos, *al-'ālam al-kabīr*. Hence in the manner that Islām is like a kingdom, a social order, so the man of Islām knows that he is a kingdom in miniature, for in him, as in all mankind, is manifested the Attributes of the Creator, without the reverse being the case, since "God created man in His Own Image". Now man is both soul and body, he is at once physical being and spirit, and his soul governs his body as God governs the Universe. Man also has two souls analogous to his dual nature: the higher, rational soul: *al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah*; and the lower, animal or carnal soul: *al-naḥs al-hayawāniyyah*. Within the conceptual framework of the concept *dīn* applied here as a subjective, personal, individual affair, man's rational soul is king and must exert its power and rule over the animal soul which is subject to it and which must be rendered submissive to it. The effective power and rule exercised by the rational soul over the animal soul, and the subjugation and total submission of the latter to the former can indeed be interpreted as *dīn*, or as *islām* in the subjective, personal, individual sense of the relationship thus established. In this context it is the animal soul that enslaves itself in submission and service and so 'returns' itself to the power and authority of the rational soul. When the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!) said:

موتوا قبل ان تموتوا

"Die before ye die."—

it is the same as saying: "Return before ye *actually* return"; and this refers to the subjugation of one's self by one's real self, one's animal soul by one's rational soul; and it is pertaining to knowledge of this Self that he means when he says:

من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه

"He who knoweth his Self knowest his Lord"

Further, when God proclaimed His Lordship to Adam's progeny it is the rational soul of man that He addressed, so that every soul has heard the "Am I not your Lord?" and answered "Yea!" and testified thus unto itself. So the man of Islām who is rightly guided acts accordingly as befits the true servant of God, His 'abd. We referred earlier to the purpose for man's creation and existence, saying that it is to serve God; and we said that the act of service on the man's part is called 'ibādah and the service as such 'ibādāt, which refers to all conscious and willing acts of service for the sake of God alone and approved by Him, including such as are prescribed worship. In point of fact, we now say further that to the man of Islām his whole ethical life is one continuous 'ibādah, for Islām itself is a complete way of life. When the man has, by mean of 'ibādāt, succeeded in curbing his animal and carnal passions and has thereby rendered submissive his animal soul, making it subject to the rational soul, the man thus described has attained to freedom in that he has fulfilled the purpose for his creation and existence; he has achieved supreme peace<sup>35</sup> and his soul is pacified, being set at liberty, as it were, free from the fetters of inexorable fate and the noisy strife and hell of human vices. His rational soul in this spiritual station is called in the Holy Qur'an the 'pacified' or 'tranquil' soul: *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*.

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<sup>35</sup> When we also say that Islām means 'Peace', we refer in fact to the *consequence* of the submission denoted by the verb *aslama*.

This is the soul that 'returns' itself willingly to its Lord, and to it will God address His Words:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً  
﴿٢٨﴾ فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ﴿٢٩﴾ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي ﴿٣٠﴾

"O thou soul at peace! Return thou to thy Lord,—  
well-pleased (thyself) and well-pleasing unto Him!  
Enter thou, then, among My servants! Yea, enter thou  
My Heaven!"<sup>36</sup>

This is the soul of the servant who has fulfilled in constant affirmation his Covenant with his Lord, and since none *knows* his Lord better than the true and loyal servant, who by reason of such service gains *intimacy* with his Lord and Master, so *'ibādah* means, in its final, advance stages, knowledge: *ma'rifah*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Fajr* (89):27-30

<sup>37</sup> We do not in the least imply here that when *'ibādah* becomes identified with *ma'rifah*, the former as *work* or *service* (*'amal*) including prayer (*ṣalāt*)—i.e. the prescribed (*farḍ*), the confirmed practice of the Prophet (*sunnaḥ*), the supererogatory (*nawāfil*)—is no longer incumbent on the one who attains to the latter, or that for such a one prayer means simply intellectual contemplation, as some philosophers thought. *Ma'rifah* as 'knowledge' is both right cognition (*'ilm*) and right feeling or spiritual mood (*ḥāl*); and the former, which marks the final stages of the spiritual 'stations' (*maqāmāt*), precedes the latter, which marks the beginning of the spiritual 'states' (*aḥwāl*). So *ma'rifah* marks the spiritual transition-point between the spiritual station and the spiritual state. As such, and since it is knowledge that comes from God to the heart (*qalb*) and depend entirely upon Him, it is not necessarily a permanent condition unless continually secured and fortified by *'ibādah*. He who discerns knows that it is absurd in the case of one who receives knowledge from God about God (i.e. the *'arīf*) to transform thereby his *'ibādah* solely into contemplation, for

I have traced in bare outline the fundamental core of the Religion of Islām and have shown in a general way which can, albeit, be elaborated to its minutest logical details its all-encompassing nature which pervades the life of the individual as well as the society. I have said that Islām is the subjective, personal religion of the individual as well as the objective pervading self-same religion of the Community—that it operates as the same religion in the individual as a single entity as well as the society composed collectively of such entities.<sup>38</sup> It is implicit in our exposition that Islām is both belief and faith (*imān*) as well as submission in service (*islām*); it is both assent of the heart (*qalb*) and ('*aql*) confirmed by the tongue (*lisān*) as well as deed and work ('*amal*);<sup>39</sup> it is the harmonious relationship established between both the soul and the body; it is obedience and loyalty (*tā'ah*) both to God as well as to the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!); it is accepting whole-

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the '*arīf* is acutely aware of the fact that he becomes one at least partly due to his '*ibādah*, which is the means by which he approaches his Lord.

<sup>38</sup> There is in truth no such thing as subjective Islām and objective Islām in the sense that the former implies less of its reality and truth than the latter, to the extent that the former is regarded as less valid and less authentic than the latter; or that the latter is other than the former as one independent reality and truth while the former is the many interpretations of the experience of the latter. We maintain that what is experienced as Islām by every individual Muslim subjectively is the same as Islām as it objectively is, and we use the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' here to distinguish rather than to differentiate the one from the other. The distinction between the two pertains to the level of understanding and the degree of insight and practice existing between one Muslim and another. The distinction thus refers to the *ihsān*-aspect of Islamic experience. In spite of the naturally different levels of understanding and degrees of insight and practice existing between one Muslim and another yet all are Muslims and there is only one Islām, and what is common to them all is the same Islām.

<sup>39</sup> i.e., '*ibādah* and acts of '*ibādāt*.

heartedly the truth of the Testimony (*kalimah shahādah*) that there is no God but Allah, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh—Islām is the unity of all these, together with what they entail, in belief and in practice, in the person of the Muslim as well as in the Community as a whole. There can be no separation, nor division, no dichotomy between the harmoniously integrated parts of the unity thus established, so that there can be, for Islām, no true believer nor faithful one (*Mu'min*) without such a one being also submissive in service (*Muslim*); no real assent of heart and mind confirmed by tongue without deed and work; no genuine obedience and loyalty to God without obedience and loyalty to His Messenger; nor can there be true acceptance of the Testimony that there is no God but Allah without also accepting Muḥammad as His Messenger, who in fact first made manifest the Formula of Unity (*kalimah al-tawḥīd*). I have also pointed out the fundamental nature of the Qur'ānic revelation of the soul's Covenant with God in respect of His Lordship and the concept of *dīn* as reflecting the cosmos, as God's government of the realm of Creation, and I have drawn a comparison in respect of that concept of *dīn* and the concept of macrocosm and its analogous relationship with man as a microcosm in which his rational soul governs his animal soul and body as God governs His Kingdom. The soul's Covenant with God and the nature of the relationship revealed in that Covenant indeed occupies a central position in the concept of *dīn* and is the fundamental basis of Islām, as I will reveal yet further. The Covenant was made to all souls of Adam's progeny and God addressed them both collectively as well as individually, so that it was a covenant made at once by every individual soul as well as all of them collectively to acknowledge God as their Lord. To acknowledge God as Lord (*rabb*) means to acknowledge Him as Absolute King (syn. *mālik*), Possessor and Owner (syn. *ṣāhib*), Ruler, Governor, Master, Creator, Cherisher, Sustainer—since all these meanings denote the connotations inherent in the concept of *Lord*. All souls have the same status in relation to

their Lord: that of being subject, possessed, owned, ruled, governed, enslaved, created, cherished and sustained. And since the Covenant pertained at once to the individual soul as well as to the soul collectively, so we see that here when manifested as man within the fold of Islām the same soul are united in their endeavour to fulfill the Covenant collectively as society and Community (*ummah*) as well as individually in such wise that Islām is, as we have said, both personal and subjective as well as social and communal and objective,<sup>40</sup> it is the harmonious blending of both the individual as well as the society. That which unite one Muslim individual to another in a wondrous and unique bond of brotherhood which transcends the restricting limitations of race and nation and space and time and is much stronger than even the familial bond of kinship is none other than this Covenant, for those souls that here as man abide by that Covenant recognize each other as brothers, as kindred souls. They were akin to one another in yonder place and here they are brethren who love one another for God's sake. Though one be in the East and the other in the West, yet they feel joy and comfort in each other's talk, and one who lives in a later generation than the other is instructed and consoled by the words of his brother. They were brothers involved in the same destiny long before they appeared as earthly brothers, and they were true kith and kin before they were born in earthly kinship. So here we see that the same Covenant is the very basis of Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*). It is this real feeling of brotherhood among Muslims based upon such firm spiritual foundations which no earthly power can rend asunder that unite the individual to the society in Islām without the individual having to suffer loss of individuality and personality, nor the society its polity and authority.

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<sup>40</sup> See above, note 38.

In the Islamic political and social organization—be it in one form or another—the same Covenant becomes their very foundation. The man of Islām is not bound by the social contract, nor does he espouse the doctrine of the Social Contract. Indeed though he lives and works within the bounds of social polity and authority and contributes his share towards the social good, and though he behaves *as if* a social contract were in force, his is, nevertheless, an *individual contract* reflecting the Covenant his soul has sealed with God; for the Covenant is in reality made for *each* and *every individual soul*. The purpose and end of ethics in Islām is ultimately for the individual; what the man of Islām does here he does in the way he believes to be good only because God and His Messenger say so and he trusts that his actions will find favour with God. Neither the state nor the society are for him real and true objects of his loyalty and obedience, for to him they are not the prerogative of state and society to the extent that such conduct is due to them as their right; and if he in an Islamic state and society lives and strives for the good of the state and the society, it is only because the society composed of individual men of Islām and the state organized by them set the same Islamic end and purpose as their goal—otherwise, he is obliged to oppose the state and strive to correct the errant society and remind them of their true aim in life. We know that in the ultimate analysis man's quest for 'happiness'—as they say in philosophy in connection with ethics—is always for the individual self. It is not the 'happiness' of the collective entity that matters so much more than individual happiness; and every man in reality must indeed think and act for his own salvation, for no other man can be made responsible for his actions since every man bears his own burden of responsibility.<sup>41</sup> 'Happiness' refers not to the physical entity in

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<sup>41</sup> See *al-An'ām* (6):164.



man, not to the animal soul and body of man; nor is it a state of mind—it has to do with certainty of the ultimate Truth and fulfillment of action in conformity with that certainty; and certainty is a permanent condition referring to what is permanent in man and perceived by his spiritual organ known as the heart (*al-qalb*). It is peace and security and tranquility of the heart; it is knowledge, and knowledge is true belief; it is knowing one's rightful, and hence proper, place in the realm of Creation and one's proper relationship with the Creator; it is a condition known as *'adl* or justice.

In Islām—because for it religion encompasses life in its entirety—all virtue is religious; it has to do with the freedom of the rational soul, which freedom means the power to do justice to itself; and this in turn refers to exercise of its rule and supremacy and guidance and maintenance over the animal soul and body. The power to do justice to itself alludes to its constant affirmation and fulfillment of the Covenant it has sealed with God. *Justice* in Islām is not a concept referring to a state of affairs which can operate only within a two-person-relation or dual-party-relation situation, such as: between one man and another; or between the society and the state; or between the ruler and the ruled; or between the king and his subjects. To the question: "Can one be unjust to one's self?" other religions or philosophies have not given a consistent clear-cut answer. Indeed in Western civilization, for example, though it is true that a man who commits suicide may be considered as committing an unjust act; but this is considered as such insofar only because his suicide deprives the state of the services of a useful citizen, so that his injustice is not to himself, but to the state and society. We have several times alluded to the concept that justice means a harmonious condition or state of affairs whereby every thing is in its right and proper place—such as the cosmos; or similarly, a state of equilibrium, whether it refers to things or living beings. With respect to man, we say that justice means basically a condition and situation whereby he is in his right and proper place. 'Place' here refers not only

to his total situation in relation to others, but also to his condition in relation to his self. So the concept of justice in Islām does not only refer to relational situations of harmony and equilibrium existing between one person and another, or between the society and the state, or between the ruler and the ruled, or between the king and his subjects, but far more profoundly and fundamentally so it refers in a primary way to the harmonious and rightly-balanced relationship existing between the man and his self, and in a secondary way only to such as exists between him and another or others, between him and his fellow men and ruler and king and state and society. Thus to the question: "Can one be unjust to one's self?" we answer in the affirmative, and add further that justice and injustice indeed *begins* and *ends* with the self. The Holy Qur'ān repeatedly stresses the point that man, when he does wrong, is being unjust (*zālim*) to himself, and that injustice (*zulm*) is a condition wrought by man upon his self.<sup>42</sup> To understand this we have to refer once again to the soul's Covenant with God and to the belief that man has a dual nature in respect of his two souls and body. The real man can only in fact be his rational soul. If in his existence as a human being he allows his animal or carnal soul to get the better of him and consequently commits acts prohibited by God and displeasing to Him, or if he denies belief in God altogether, then he has thereby repudiated his own affirmation of God's Lordship which he as rational soul has covenanted with God. He does violence to his own Covenant, his individual contract with God. So just as in the case of one who violates his own contract being calamity upon himself, in the same way he who does wrong or evil, who disobeys or denies God, violates the contract his soul has made with God, thereby being unjust to his soul. He has also thereby 'lied'—*kadhaba*, another apt Quranic expression—against his own self (soul). It is important in the light of this brief

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<sup>42</sup> See *al-Nisā'* (4):123; *Yūnus* (10):44.

explanation to understand why the belief in the resurrection of bodies is fundamental in Islām, for the soul reconstituted with its former body will not be able to deny what its body had done, for its very eyes, tongue, hands and feet or limbs—the organs of ethical and moral conduct—will testify against its acts of injustice to itself.<sup>43</sup> Though in Islām injustice ostensibly applies between man and God, and between man and man, and between man and his self, in reality, however, injustice is ultimately applicable—even in the two former cases—to man's self alone; in the Islamic world view and spiritual vision, whether a man disbelieves or disobeys God, or whether he does wrong to another man, it is really to his own self that he does wrong. Injustice, being the opposite of justice, is the putting a thing in a place not its own; it is to misplace a thing; it is to misuse or to wrong; it is to exceed or fall short of the mean or limit; it is to suffer loss; it is deviation from the right course; it is disbelief of what is true, or lying about what is true knowing it to be true. Thus when a man does an act of injustice, it means that he has wronged his own soul, for he has put his soul in a place not its own; he has misused it; he has made it to exceed or fall short of its real nature; he has caused it to deviate from what is right and to repudiate the truth and to suffer loss. All that he has thus done—in one way or another—entails a violation of his Covenant with God. It is clear from what we say about injustice that justice implies *knowledge* of the

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<sup>43</sup> Analogically, the legal concept of *habeas corpus* (you must have the body) as a fundamental procedure of justice is perhaps only a mere imperfect reflection of the awesome and irrefutable Procedure to come. That the soul is capable of denial of acts of injustice is implied in *al-A'rāf* (7):172-173; and in these Verses must be seen clear evidence of the soul's capacity (*wus'*) to exercise a power (*quwwah*) of inclination towards right or wrong resulting in its acquisition or earning (*kasaba, iktasaba*) of good or evil. In the Islamic concept of justice and injustice outlined above, the fact that the witness to man's actions, good or bad, is his own self is of great significance. See also *al-Nūr* (24):24.

right and proper place for a thing or a being to be; of right as against wrong; of the mean or limit; of spiritual gain as against loss; of truth as against falsehood. This is why knowledge (*al-‘ilm: ma’rifah: ‘ilm*) occupies a most important position in Islām, where in the Holy Qur’ān alone we find more than eight hundred references to knowledge. And even in the case of knowledge, man has to do justice to it, that is, to know its limit of usefulness and not to exceed or fall short of it ; to know its various orders of priority in relation to its usefulness to one’s self; to know where to stop and to know what can be gained and what cannot, what is true knowledge and what is learned guess and theory—in sum, to put every datum of knowledge in its right place in relation to the knowing one in such wise that what is known produces harmony in the one who knows. To know how to put what knowledge in which place is wisdom (*hikmah*). Otherwise, knowledge without order and seeking it without discipline does lead to confusion and hence to injustice to one’s self.<sup>44</sup>

Knowledge, as we understand it, is of two kinds: that given by God to man; and that acquired by man by means of his own effort of rational enquiry based upon experience and observation. The first kind can only be received by man through his acts of worship and devotion, his acts of service to God (*‘ibādāt*) which, depending upon God’s grace and his own latent spiritual power and capacity created by God to receive it, the man receives by direct insight or spiritual savouring (*dhawq*) and unveiling to his spiritual vision (*kashf*). This knowledge (*ma’rifah*) pertains to his self or soul, and such knowledge—as we have touched upon cursorily in our comparison of the analogous relationship obtained between the macrocosm and

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<sup>44</sup> Order’ and ‘discipline’ here do not refer to the kind of order and discipline in the systematic deployment of knowledge found in modern universities and schools, but to the ordering of knowledge by the self that seeks to know, and to the disciplining of the self of itself to that ordering (see below pp. 33-35).

the microcosm—gives insight into knowledge of God, and for that reason is the highest knowledge. Since such knowledge ultimately depends upon God's grace and because it entails deeds and works of service to God as prerequisites to its possible attainment, it follows that for it knowledge of the prerequisites becomes necessary, and this includes knowledge of the essentials of Islām (*arkān al-islām* and *arkān al-īmān*), their meanings and purpose and correct understanding and implementation in everyday life and practice: every Muslim must have knowledge of these prerequisites, must understand the basic essentials of Islām and the Unity of God (*tawhīd*), and practice the knowledge (*al-ʿilm*) in deeds and works of service to God so that every man of Islām is in fact already in the initial stage of that first knowledge; he is set ready on the Straight Path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) leading to God. His further progress on the pilgrim's path depends upon his own performance and sincerity of purpose, so that some serve God as though they see Him, and others serve Him as though He sees them; and the pilgrim's progress to the former way from the latter is what constitutes the highest virtue (*iḥsān*). The second kind of knowledge (*ʿilm*) is acquired through experience and observation; it is discursive and deductive and it refers to objects of pragmatical value. As an illustration of the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge we might suppose a man and his neighbour who has just moved in to his neighbourhood. At first he knows his new neighbour only by acquaintance; he might know the other's general appearance and be able to recognize him when meeting in the street; he might learn his name, his marital status, the number of his children and many other such details of information which he can obtain by observation. Then he might, through inquiries from others he knows and private investigation, discover his neighbour's occupation and place of work and appointment, and he might even find out, through further discreet investigation, how much he earns. He might go on investigating in this way without coming into direct contact

with his neighbour and accumulate other data about him, and yet his knowledge of him would still be on the level of acquaintance and not of intimacy, for no matter how many more details he might add on to the knowledge about his neighbour thus acquired, there will be many more important personal details which he will never be able to know, such as the other's loves and fears and hopes and beliefs, his thoughts on life and death, his secret thoughts and feelings, his good qualities and other details such as these. Now let us suppose that he decides to know the man directly and introduces himself to him; he visits him often and eats and drinks and sports with him. Then after long years of faithful friendship and sincere companionship and devotion he might perchance receive by direct and spontaneous revelation from his friend and companion some of the many personal details and secret thoughts and feelings that are now in a flash revealed in a way which he will not be able to obtain in a lifetime of investigation and observation and research. Even this knowledge, given as a result of intimacy, is never complete, for we know that no matter how close the intimate relationship between the man and his friend—or brother, or wife and children, or parents, or lover—there will always be for him that veil of mystery that ever envelopes the one to be known like an infinite series of Chinese spherical ivory carving within carving, only to be unveiled for him by direct revelation from the other. And the other too will know by contemplating his self the infinite nature of that self that ever eludes his cognitive quest, so that even he is not able to reveal except only that which he knows. Every man is like an island set in a fathomless sea enveloped by darkness, and the loneliness his self knows is so utterly absolute because even he knows not his self completely. From this illustration we may derive certain basic conditions analogous to the first kind of knowledge. First, the desire by the one who gives knowledge about himself to be known. Second, the giving of such knowledge pertains to the same level of being, and this is because communication of ideas and feelings is possible and

can be understood. Third, to be allowed to approach and know him, the one who seeks to know must abide by rules of propriety and codes of conduct and behavior acceptable to the one who desires to be known. Fourth, his giving knowledge about himself is based on trust after a considerable period of testing of the other's sincerity and loyalty and devotion and capacity to receive—a period in which is established a firm bond of intimacy between the two. In like manner and even more so, then, is the case with knowledge given by God. In respect of the first condition, He says in the Holy Qur'ān that He has created man only that man may serve Him, and service in its profoundest sense ultimately means knowledge (*ma'rifah*), so that His purpose of creation is for the creature to *know* Him, as He says in the Holy Tradition (*Hadith Qudsiyy*):

كنت كنزا مخفيا فأحببت أن أعرف فخلقت الخلق لكي أعرف

“I was a Hidden Treasure, and I desired to be known,  
so I created Creation that I might be known.”

Thus, God reveals Himself to the rational soul, which possesses organs of spiritual communication and cognition such as the heart (*al-qalb*), which knows Him; the spirit (*al-rūh*), which loves Him; and the secret or inmost ground of the soul (*al-sirr*), which contemplates Him. Though the rational soul is not of the same level of being as God, there is yet in it that spark of Divine origin which makes it possible for it to receive communication from above and to have cognition of what is received; and from this we derive analogy for the second condition. In the case of the third condition, we say that man approaches God by sincere submission to His Will and absolute obedience to His Law; by conscious realization in himself of His Commands and Prohibitions and Ordinances, and by performance of acts of devotion and supererogatory worship approved by Him and pleasing unto Him, until such a man

attains to the station in which His trust and friendship may be conferred upon him by means of knowledge given as a gift of grace to him for whom He has created the capacity to receive corresponding to the knowledge given. Thus, His words in a Holy Tradition:

لا يزال عبدي يتقرب الي بالنوافل حتى احبه فاذا احبته كنت  
سمعه الذي يسمع به وبصره الذي يبصر به ولسانه الذي ينطق  
به ويده التي يبطش بها

“My servant ceases not to draw nigh unto Me by supererogatory worship until I love him; and when I love him I am his ear, so that he hears by Me, and his eye, so that he sees by Me, and his tongue, so that he speaks by Me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me.”

As to the fourth condition of trust, it is part of the third, and this is in itself already clear. We see then that such knowledge, by virtue of its very nature, imparts truth and certainty of a higher order than that obtained in knowledge of the second kind; and because of this, and of the fact that it pertains to the soul or self of man and its fulfillment of the Covenant made with God, knowledge of its prerequisites, which is in fact based on this given knowledge, is inextricably bound up with Islamic ethics and morality. By means of such knowledge and the practice it entails we guide and govern ourselves in daily conduct and set our values in life and ourselves aright. The first knowledge unveils the mystery of Being and Existence and reveals the true relationship between man's self and his Lord, and since for man such knowledge pertains to the ultimate purpose for knowing, it follows that knowledge of its prerequisites becomes the basis and essential foundation for knowledge of the second kind, for knowledge of the latter alone, without the guiding spirit of the former, cannot truly



lead man in his life, but only confuses and confounds him and enmeshes him in the labyrinth of endless and purposeless seeking. We also perceive that there is a limit for man even to the first and highest knowledge; whereas no such limit obtains in the second kind, so that the possibility of perpetual wandering spurred on by intellectual deception and self-delusion in constant doubt and curiosity is always real. The individual man has no time to waste in his momentary sojourn on earth, and the rightly guided one knows that his individual quest for knowledge of the second kind must needs be limited to his own practical needs and suited to his nature and capacity, so that he may set both the knowledge and himself in their right places in relation to his real self and thus maintain a condition of justice. For this reason and in order to achieve justice as the end, Islām distinguishes the quest for the two kinds of knowledge, making the one for the attainment of knowledge of the prerequisites of the first obligatory to all Muslims (*farḍ ‘ayn*) and that of the other obligatory to some Muslims only (*farḍ kifāyah*), and the obligation for the latter can indeed be transferred to the former category in the case of those who deem themselves duty bound to seek it for their self improvement. The division in the obligatory quest for knowledge into two categories is itself a procedure of doing justice to knowledge and to the man who seeks it, for *all* of the knowledge of the prerequisites of the first knowledge is good for man, whereas *not all* of the knowledge of the second kind is good for him, for the man who seeks the latter knowledge, which would bear considerable influence in determining his secular role and position as a citizen, might not necessarily be a *good* man. In Western civilization generally, because its conception of justice is based on secular foundations, it follows that its conception of knowledge is also based upon similar foundations, or complimentary foundations emphasizing man as a physical entity and a rational animal being, to the extent that it admits of what we have referred to as the second kind of knowledge as the only valid ‘knowledge’ possible.

Consequently, the purpose of seeking knowledge from the lower to the higher levels is, for Western civilization, to produce in the seeker a good citizen. Islām, however, differs in this in that for it the purpose of seeking knowledge is to produce in the seeker a good man. We maintain that it is more fundamental to produce a good man than to produce a good citizen, for the good man will no doubt also be a good citizen, but the good citizen will not necessarily also be a good man. In a sense we say that Islām too maintains that the purpose of seeking knowledge is to produce in the seeker a good citizen, only that we mean by 'citizen' a Citizen of that other Kingdom, so that he acts as such even here and now as a good man. The concept of a 'good man' in Islām connotes not only that he must be 'good' in the general social sense understood, but that he must also first be good to his self, and not be unjust to it in the way we have explained, for if he were unjust to his self, how can he really be just to others? Thus we see that, already in this most fundamental concept in life—the concept of knowledge—Islām is at variance with Western civilization, in that for Islām (a) knowledge includes faith and true belief (*īmān*); and that (b) the purpose for seeking knowledge is to inculcate goodness or justice in man as man and individual self, and not merely in man as citizen or integral part of society: it is man's value as a real man, as spirit, that is stressed, rather than his value—as a physical entity measured in terms of the pragmatic or utilitarian sense of his usefulness to state and society and the world.

I have been describing what constitutes the very core of the Religion of Islām, and in this description have explained in brief but simple and succinct manner the fundamental concept of *dīn* and of faith and belief in Islām. I have touched upon the Islamic world view and have stressed the paramount importance of the Qur'ānic concept of man's Covenant with God, showing how this Covenant is of an essential nature; it is the starting point in the Islamic concept of religion, and is the dominant element in all other Islamic concepts bound up with

it, such as those of freedom and responsibility, of justice, of knowledge, of virtue, of brotherhood; of the role and character of the individual and the society and of their mutual identity in the framework of the state and of collective life. I have in this description also emphasized the role of the individual, and of the individual the self, or soul, and its journey of return to God. It now behoves me to describe in outline the Islamic vision of Reality, which is no other than the philosophical core of Islām which determines its world view. Islām focuses its religious and philosophical vision (*shuhūd*) of Reality and its world view on Being, and distinguishes between Being (*wujūd*) and Existence (*mawjūd*); between Unity (*wahdah*) and Multiplicity (*kathrah*); between Subsistence (*baqā'*) and Evanescence (*fanā'*). This vision of Reality is based upon revealed knowledge through religious experience, and embraces both the objective, metaphysical and ontological reality as well as the subjective, mystical and psychological experience of that reality. Phenomenologically Islām, in confirmation of its vision of Reality, affirms 'being' rather than 'becoming' or 'coming-into-being', for the Object of its vision is clear, established, permanent and unchanging. This confirmation and affirmation is absolute because it springs from the certainty (*yaqīn*) of revealed knowledge; and since its Object is clear and established and permanent and unchanging, so likewise is Islām, together with its way of life and method of practice and values, an absolute reflection of the mode of the Object. Thus Islām itself is like its Object in that it emulates its ontological nature as subsisting and unchanging—as being; and hence affirms itself to be complete and perfect as confirmed by God's words in the Holy Qur'ān,<sup>45</sup> and it denies the possibility of ever being in need of completion or evolution towards perfection; and such concept as *development* and *progress* and *perfection* when applied to man's

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<sup>45</sup> *Al-Mā'idah* (5):4

life and history and destiny must indeed refer, in Islām, ultimately to the spiritual and real nature of man. If this were not so, then it can never really mean, for Islām, *true* development and progress and perfection, as it would mean only the development and progress and perfection of the animal in man; and that would not be his true evolution unless such evolution realizes in him his true nature as spirit.

*Change, development and progress*, according to the Islamic viewpoint, refer to the return to the genuine Islām enunciated and practiced by the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!) and his noble Companions and their Followers (blessing and peace be upon them all!) and the faith and practice of genuine Muslims after them; and they also refer to the self and mean its return to its original nature and religion (Islām). These concepts pertain to presupposed situations in which Muslims find themselves going astray and steeped in ignorance of Islām and are confused and unjust to their selves. In such situations, their endeavour to direct their selves back onto the Straight and True Path and to return to the condition of genuine Islām—such endeavour, which entails change, is development; and such return, which consists in development, is progress. Thus for Islām, the process of movement towards genuine Islām by Muslims who have strayed away from it is development; and such development is the only one that can truly be termed as progress. Progress is neither ‘becoming’ or ‘coming-into-being’, nor movement towards that which is ‘coming-into-being’ and never becomes ‘being’ for the notion of ‘something aimed at’, or the ‘goal’ inherent in the concept ‘progress’ can only contain real meaning when it refers to that which is already *clear* and permanently *established*, already *being*. Hence what is already clear and established, already in the state of being, cannot suffer change, nor is it subject to constant slipping from the grasp of achievement, nor constantly receding beyond attainment. The term ‘progress’ reflects a *definite direction* that is aligned to a *final purpose* that is meant to be achieved in life; if the direction sought is still vague, still

coming-into-being, as it were, and the purpose aligned to it is not final, then how can involvement in it truly mean progress? Those who grope in the dark cannot be referred to as progressing, and they who say such people are progressing have merely uttered a lie against the true meaning and purpose of progress, and they have lied unto their selves!

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ  
 ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ صُمُّ  
 بُكْمٌ عُمَى فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ أَوْ كَصَيِّبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ  
 ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ مِنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ  
 حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٩﴾ يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ  
 أَبْصَارَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا  
 وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى  
 كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

Their similitude is that of a man  
 Who kindled a fire;  
 When it lighted all around him,  
 God took away their light  
 And left them in utter darkness  
 So they could not see,  
 Deaf, dumb and blind,  
 They will not return (to the path).  
 Or (another similitude)  
 Is that of a rain-laden cloud  
 From the sky: in it are zones  
 Or darkness, and thunder and lightning:  
 They press their fingers in their ears

To keep out the stunning thunder-clap,  
The while they are in terror of death.  
But God is ever round  
The rejecters of Faith!  
The lightning all but snatches away  
Their sight; every time the light  
(Helps) them, they walk therein,  
And when the darkness grows on them,  
They stand still.  
And if God willed, He could take away  
Their faculty of hearing and seeing;  
For God hath power over all things.<sup>46</sup>

The Islamic world view is not to be construed as a dualism, for although two elements are involved, yet the one is independent and subsistent while the other is dependent upon it; the one is absolute and the other relative; the one is real and the other a manifestation of that reality. So there is only One Reality and Truth, and all Islamic values pertain ultimately to It alone, so that to the Muslim, individually and collectively, all endeavour towards change and development and progress and perfection is invariably determined by the world view that projects the vision of the One Reality and confirms the affirmation of the same Truth. In this way in practice Muslims have been able to live their lives in accordance with the belief without suffering any change to be wrought that would disrupt the harmony of Islām and their own selves; without succumbing to the devastating touch of time, nor to the attendant challenges in the vicissitudes of worldly existence. The man of Islām has with him the Holy Qur'ān which is itself unchanged, unchanging and unchangeable; it is the Word of God revealed in complete and final form to His Chosen Messenger and Last Prophet Muḥammad (may God bless and give him Peace!). It is the

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<sup>46</sup> *Al-Baqarah* (2):17-20.

clear Guidance which he carries with him everywhere, not merely literally so, but more in his tongue and mind and heart, so that it becomes the very vital force that moves his human frame. I have said earlier, when referring to man's contemplation of his self, how every man is like an island set in isolation in a fathomless sea enveloped by darkness, saying that the loneliness his self knows is so utterly absolute because even *he* knows not his self completely. I must add that such utter loneliness basically springs from man's inability to answer his own persistent ageless inner question to himself: "Who am I?" and "What is my ultimate destiny?" We say that such experience of utter loneliness, however, assails only the heart of the man who denies God, or doubts Him, or repudiates his soul's Covenant with God; for it is, again, recognition and affirmation of that same Covenant that established for man his identity in the order of Being and Existence. The man of Islām—he who confirms and affirms the Covenant within his self—is never lonely for even when contemplating his self he knows intuitively, through acts of *'ibādah* that include constant recitation and reflection and contemplation of the words of God in the Holy Qur'ān, how close that self is with God, his Creator and Lord Whom he ever contemplates in remembrance (*dhikr*) and with whom he has intimate converse (*munājāt*). Such a man has identified his self to himself and knows his ultimate destiny, and he is secure within his self and free from the terrifying echoes of absolute loneliness and the breathless grip of silent fear. In affirmation of Being, the Holy Qur'ān, the source of Islām and projector of the Islamic world view and the vision of the One Reality and Truth, is the expression of the finality and perfection of 'being' just as Islām is the phenomenological affirmation of 'being'; and he who conveyed the Holy Qur'ān to mankind himself represents the finality and perfection of 'being' in man. The Holy Prophet,

upon whom be God's blessing and Peace! is the Seal of the Prophets,<sup>47</sup> the universal and final Messenger of God to mankind,<sup>48</sup> whom he leads from darkness to light;<sup>49</sup> who is himself the Lamp spreading Light,<sup>50</sup> he is God's Mercy to all creatures,<sup>51</sup> and His favour to those who believe in him and in what he brought<sup>52</sup> and He is God's favour even to the People of the Book,<sup>53</sup> who may yet come to believe in him. He is man whom God has created with a character exalted as the standard for mankind;<sup>54</sup> he is the Perfect Man and Exemplar *par excellence*.<sup>55</sup> He it is who even God and His Angels honour and bless as the greatest of men,<sup>56</sup> and all true Believers, in compliance with God's Command, and in emulation of His Angels, do likewise, and have done and will do so in this world and the next for as long as God wills; and in the Hereafter to him will God vouchsafe the Lauded Station.<sup>57</sup> Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, is he whose very name is a miracle of fulfillment for he alone among all mankind is constantly praised in every age and generation after him without end, so that even taking into account the ages and generations before him he still would be the only man to whom such praise is due. We praise him out of sincere love and respect and gratitude for having led us out of darkness into light, and he is loved above all other human beings including our selves. Our love and respect for him is such that neither time nor memory could dull, for he is in our selves in every age and generation—nay,

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<sup>47</sup> *Al-Aḥzāb* (33):40

<sup>48</sup> *Sabā* (34):28

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Ṭalāq* (65):11

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Aḥzāb* (33):46; *al-Ṭalāq* (65):11

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Anbiyā'* (21):107

<sup>52</sup> *Āli-'Imrān* (3):164; *al-Nisā'* (4):170

<sup>53</sup> *Al-Mā'idah* (5):21

<sup>54</sup> *Al-Qalam* (68):4

<sup>55</sup> *Al-Aḥzāb* (33):21

<sup>56</sup> *Al-Aḥzāb* (33):56

<sup>57</sup> *Banī Isrā'īl* (17):79



he is closer than ourselves,<sup>58</sup> and we emulate his words (*qawl*) and model actions (*fi'l*) and silent confirmation (*taqrir*) of usages known to him, so that next to the Holy Qur'ān he is our most excellent and perfect guide and exemplar in life. He is the perfect model for every Muslim male and female; adolescent, middle-aged and old, in such wise that Muslims do not suffer from the crises of identity. Because of him the external structure or pattern of Muslim society is not divided by the gap of generations such as we find prevalent in Western society. Western civilization is constantly changing and 'becoming' without ever achieving 'being', except that its 'being' is and always has been a 'becoming'. This is and has been so by virtue of the fact that it acknowledges no single, established Reality to fix its vision on; no single, valid Scripture to confirm and affirm in life; no single, human Guide whose words and deeds and actions and entire mode of life can serve as model to emulate in life, but that each and every individual must find for himself and herself each one's identity and meaning of life and destiny. Western civilization affirms the evanescent (*fanā*) aspect of reality, and its values pertain to the secular, material and physical realities of existence. Western society is thus divided by gaps between the three generations: the youth, the middle-aged, and the old. Each separate generation moves within the confines of its own attempts at finding a meaning for its own self and life in an ageless search for the answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "What is my destiny?". The youth who at that stage experience change in life, consider the values handed down by their fathers, the middle-ages, no longer useful nor relevant to their way of life. Consequently, they do not take the middle-aged as models to guide them in life, and hence demand of them their freedom to choose their own destiny. The middle-aged, realizing *their* values too, when they were in the prime of youth, did not

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<sup>58</sup> *Al-Ahzāb* (33):6

succeed in guiding them in life, and now they know they are themselves unable to provide the necessary guidance for their sons, and so surrender freedom which they seek to choose their destiny in the hope that youth may yet succeed where they had failed. Now the youth, in demanding freedom to choose their own destiny, also know that they need guidance, which is unfortunately not available, for even from their very midst they are unable to bring forth a leader who can play the role of perfect model whose example can be emulated by others. This disconcerting situation creates in youth uncertainty and much doubt about the future, and they desperately dare to hope that when *they* reach the middle-aged they would then be able to remould the world nearer to their heart's desire. But the middle-aged, who play the central role in moulding and preserving their state, society, and world, know from experience in their youth that their former values now no longer serve a purpose and have lost their meaning in life; and since their former search for identity has failed, so their present lives do not reflect contentment of fulfillment and are void of happiness. Thus, the values they now esteem, the values that now become for them the measure of their success in searching for meaning in their individual lives, are only those promoting secular and materialistic achievements pertaining to the state and society; and so they strive and relentlessly compete among themselves to gain high places in the social ladder, or wealth and power and world renown. In the midst of such struggle, they realize that their mental capacity and intelligence are beginning to weaken; physical power and vitality are beginning to deteriorate, and consternation and regret and sadness begin to take hold of their selves when there appear in successive series before their mental perception the vision of retirement from public life into the loneliness of old age. Consequently, they look to youth with nostalgia and set high hopes that the youth may yet bring forth the longed-for perfect model and exemplar in life for all society to emulate; and this attitude towards youth is the very

core of the worship of Youth, which is one of the dominant features of Western civilization since ancient times. The crisis of identity experienced by the middle-aged is somewhat similar to that experienced by the youth, with the exception that, for the middle-aged, the freedom to choose their destiny is increasingly limited, for time relentlessly moves on like a Greek tragedy to the very end. The old, in such a society, are mere creatures forgotten by society, because their very existence reminds the youth and middle-aged of what they would be like which they want to forget. The old remind them of dissolution and death; the old have lost physical power and vitality; they have lost success; they have lost memory and their use and function in society; they have lost friend and family—they have lost the future. When a society bases its philosophy of life upon secular foundations and espouses materialistic values to live by, it inevitably follows that the meaning and value and quality of life of the individual citizen therein is interpreted and measured in terms of his position as a citizen; his occupation and use and working and earning power in relation to the state. When in old age all this is gone, so likewise his identity—which is in fact moulded by the secular role he plays—is lost. The three generations that in such wise comprise Western society are forever engaged in the search for identity and meaning of life; are forever moving in the vicious circle of unattainment; each generation dissatisfied with its own self—evolved values of life; each generation finding itself a misfit. And this condition, we maintain, is what we mean by injustice (*zulm*). This condition is further aggravated by the fact that in Western society there exists also a crisis of identity between the sexes, in that women are engaged, as women, in the search for *their* own, separate identity. Islamic society is not beset by such condition. The individuals within the generations that comprise it, whether male or female, have already established their identity and recognized their ultimate destiny; the former through recognition and confirmation of the Covenant, and the latter through affirmation and realization of that Covenant

by means of sincere submission to God's Will and obedience to His Law such as enacted as Islām. The man who brought to us the Holy Qur'ān as it was revealed to him by God, who thus brought to us the Knowledge of our identity and destiny, whose own life is the most excellent and perfect interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān so that his life becomes for us the focus of emulation and true guiding spirit, is the Holy Prophet, may God bless and give him Peace! By his teaching and example he has shown us the right and true practice of Islām and of Islamic virtues; he is the perfect model not merely for one generation, but for all generations; not merely for a time, but for all time. Indeed, we say that the concept 'perfect model' can fulfill its true meaning only if he who is thus described, such as Muḥammad alone is, embodies within his self all the permanent human and spiritual values necessary for man's guidance in life, whose validity is such that they serve man not only for the span of his individual lifetime, but for as long as man lives in this world. So every generation of Muslims, emulating his example, passes on the way of life he patterned to the next in such wise that no gaps nor crisis of identity occur between them, but that each preceding generation guides the next by confirming and affirming his example in their lives.

The problem of human identity and destiny is, to my mind, the root cause of all other problems that beset modern society. Many challenges have arisen in the midst of man's confusion throughout the ages, but none perhaps more serious and destructive to man than today's challenge posed by Western civilization. I venture to maintain that the greatest challenge that has surreptitiously arisen in our age is the challenge of knowledge, indeed, not as against ignorance, but knowledge as conceived and disseminated throughout the world by Western civilization; knowledge whose nature has become problematic because it has lost its true purpose due to being unjustly conceived, and has thus brought about chaos in man's life instead of, and rather than, peace and justice; knowledge which pretends to be real but which is productive of confusion and

scepticism, which has elevated doubt and conjecture to the 'scientific' rank in methodology; knowledge which has, for the first time in history, brought chaos to the Three Kingdoms of Nature; the animal, vegetal and mineral. It seems to me important to emphasize that knowledge is not neutral, and can indeed be infused with a nature and content which masquerades as knowledge. Yet it is in fact, taken as a whole, not true knowledge, but its interpretation through the prism, as it were, the world-view, the intellectual vision and psychological perception of the civilization that now plays the key role in its formulation and dissemination. What is formulated and disseminated is knowledge infused with the character and personality of that civilization—knowledge presented and conveyed as knowledge in that guise so subtly fused together with the real so that others take it unawares *in toto* to be the real knowledge *per se*. What is the character and personality, the essence and spirit of Western civilization that has so transformed both itself and the world, bringing all who accept its interpretation of knowledge to a state of chaos leading to the brink of disaster? By 'Western civilization' I mean the civilization that has evolved out of historical fusion of cultures, philosophies, values and aspirations of ancient Greece and Rome; their amalgamation with Judaism and Christianity, and their further development and formation by the Latin, Germanic, Celtic and Nordic peoples. From ancient Greece is derived the philosophical and epistemological elements and the foundations of education and of ethics and aesthetics; from Rome the elements of law and statecraft and government; from Judaism and Christianity the elements of religious faith; and from the Latin, Germanic, Celtic and Nordic peoples their independent and national spirit and traditional values, and the development and advancement of the natural and physical sciences and technology which they, together with the Slavic peoples, have pushed to such pinnacles of power. Islām too has made very significant contributions to Western civilization in the sphere of knowledge and in the inculcation of the rational

and scientific spirit, but the knowledge and the rational and scientific spirit have been recast and remoulded to fit the crucible of Western culture so that they have become fused and amalgamated with all the other elements that form the character and personality of Western civilization. But the fusion and amalgamation thus evolved produced a characteristic dualism in the world-view and values of Western culture and civilization; a dualism that cannot be resolved into a harmonious unity, for it is formed of conflicting ideas, values, cultures, beliefs, philosophies, dogmas, doctrines and theologies altogether reflecting an all-pervasive dualistic vision of reality and truth locked in despairing combat. Dualism abides in all aspects of Western life and philosophy: the speculative, the social, the political, the cultural—just as it pervades with equal inexorableness the Western religion.

It formulates its vision of truth and reality not upon revealed knowledge and religious belief, but rather upon cultural tradition reinforced by strictly philosophical premises based upon speculations pertaining mainly to secular life centered upon man as physical entity and rational animal, setting great store upon man's intellectual capacity alone to unravel the mysteries of his total environment and involvement in existence, and to conceive out of the results of speculations based upon such premises his evolutionary ethical and moral values to guide and order his life accordingly. There can be no certainty in philosophical speculations in the sense of religious certainty based on revealed knowledge understood and experienced in Islām;<sup>59</sup> and because of this the knowledge and

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<sup>59</sup> See above, p. 36, reference to *yaqīn* (certainty). The Holy Qur'an mentions three degrees or level of certainty of knowledge: certainty derived by inference, whether deductive or inductive: *'ilm al-yaqīn* (*al-Takāthur* (102):5); certainty derived by direct vision: *'ayn al-yaqīn* (*al-Takāthur* (102):7); and certainty derived by direct experience *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (*al-Hāqqah* (69):51). These levels of certain knowledge pertain to truth, whether manifest or hidden, empirical or transcendental;

values that project the world-view and direct his life of such a civilization is subject to review and change.

The inquiring spirit of Western culture and civilization originated with disenchantment towards religion as that civilization understands it. Religion in the sense we mean as outlined here has never really taken root in Western civilization due to its excessive and misguided love of the world and secular life and of man and preoccupation with man's secular destiny. Its inquiring spirit is basically generated in a state of doubt and inner tension; the inner tension is the result of the clash of conflicting elements and opposing values in the sustained dualism, while the doubts maintain the state of inner tension. The state of inner tension in turn produces the insatiable desire to seek and to embark on a perpetual journey of discoveries. The quest insatiable and the journey perpetual because doubt ever prevails, so that what is sought is never really found, what is discovered never really satisfies its true purpose. It is like the thirsty traveller who at first sincerely sought the water of knowledge, but who later, having found it plain perhaps, proceeded to temper his cup with the salt of doubt so that his thirst now becomes insatiable though he drinks incessantly, and that in thus drinking the water that cannot slake his thirst, he has forgotten the original and true purpose for which the water was sought. The fundamental truths of religion are regarded, in such a scheme of things, as mere theories, or discarded altogether as futile illusions. Absolute values are denied and relative values affirmed; nothing can be certain, except the certainty that nothing can be certain. The logical consequence of such attitude towards knowledge, which determines and is determined by the world-

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and the certain knowledge of what is hidden has the same force of certainty as that of what is visible. These levels of certainty also pertain to that which is perceived by the spiritual organ of cognition, the heart (*al-qalb*), and refers to knowledge as belief and faith (*īmān*). See p. 26 above.

view, is to negate God and the Hereafter and affirm man and his world. Man is deified and Deity humanized, and the world becomes man's sole preoccupation so that even his own immortality consists in the continuation of his species and his culture in this world. What is called 'change' and 'development' and 'progress' in all their aspects as far as Western civilization is concerned is the result of the insatiable quest and perpetual journey spurred on by doubt and inner tension. The context in which the notion of change and development and progress is understood is always this-worldly, presenting a consistently materialistic world-view that can be termed as a kind of humanistic existentialism. The spirit of Western culture that describes itself as Promethean is like the Camusian Sisyphus who desperately hopes that all is well. I say *desperately hopes* that all is well because I suspect that the fact cannot be that all is well, for I believe that he can never really be truly happy in that state. The pursuit of knowledge, like the struggle to push the Stone from the plains up the Mountain where at the top it is destined to roll down again, becomes a kind of serious *game*, never ceasing, as if to distract the soul from the tragedy of unattainment. No wonder, then, that in Western culture *tragedy* is extolled as being among the noblest values in the *drama* of human existence!

Reliance upon the powers of human intellect alone to guide man through life; adherence to the validity of the dualistic vision of reality and truth; affirmation of the reality of the evanescent-aspect of existence projecting a secular world-view; espousal of the doctrine of humanism; emulation of the allegedly universal reality of drama and tragedy in the spiritual, or transcendental, or inner life of man, making drama and tragedy real and dominant elements in human nature and existence—these elements altogether taken as a whole are, in my opinion, what constitute the substance, the spirit, the character and personality of Western culture and civilization. It is these elements that determine for that culture and civilization the moulding of its concept of knowledge and



the direction of its purpose, the formulation of its contents and the systematization of its dissemination; so that the knowledge that is now systematically disseminated throughout the world is not necessarily *true* knowledge, but that which is imbued with the character and personality of the Western culture and civilization, and charged with its spirit and geared to its purpose. And it is these elements, then, that must be identified and separated and isolated from the body of knowledge, so that knowledge may be distinguished from what is imbued with these elements, for these elements and what is imbued with them do not represent knowledge as such but they only determine the characteristic form in which knowledge is conceived and evaluated and interpreted in accordance with the purpose aligned to the world-view of Western civilization. It follows too that apart from the identification and separation and isolation of these elements from the body of knowledge, which will no doubt also alter the conceptual form and values and interpretation of some of the contents of knowledge as it is now presented,<sup>60</sup> its very purpose and system of deployment and dissemination in institutions of learning and in the domain of education must needs be altered accordingly. It may be argued that what is suggested is but *another, alternative* interpretation of knowledge imbued with other conceptual forms and values aligned to another purpose which reflects another world-view; and that this being so, and by the same token, what is formulated and disseminated as knowledge might not necessarily reflect *true* knowledge. This, however, remains to be seen, for the test of true knowledge is in man himself, in that if, through an alternative interpretation of knowledge man knows himself and his ultimate destiny,<sup>61</sup> and in thus knowing he achieves happiness,<sup>62</sup> then that knowledge,

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<sup>60</sup> 'Some of the contents of knowledge' referred to here pertains mainly to the human sciences.

<sup>61</sup> See above, pp. 26-36; 41-45

<sup>62</sup> See above, p. 26.

in spite of its being imbued with certain elements that determine the characteristic form in which it is conceived and evaluated and interpreted in accordance with the purpose aligned to a particular world-view, is true knowledge; for such knowledge has fulfilled man's purpose for knowing.

والله أعلم بالصواب  
والحمد لله رب العالمين  
والصلاة والسلام على أشرف المرسلين  
وعلى آله وأصحابه والتابعين  
لهم باحسان الى يوم الدين  
آمين